3.5 BEAUTIFUL TROUBLE: POSSIBILITIES IN THE ARTS WITH STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH

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Beautiful trouble makers who remember, resist and reimagine.
—Min Sook Lee, OCAD University, Art and Social Change

Offering Crys[2] a ride "home" after a jewelry-making workshop led me to a makeshift "shanty town" under the Bathurst Street bridge in Toronto. I was struck by the vivid colour and detail in this woven compilation of blankets, boxes, and condo sales sandwich boards, used to create multi-storey structures, walls, doors, beds, tables, and chairs. It looked like a theatre set. Crys told me that over 20 youth lived there, and it had taken months to construct. Everyone had a role in this "under-the-bridge" community. Someone fed the dogs and another created the schedule for their walks; someone held the alarm clock to wake people for jobs, school, or appointments; others led study and support groups for those in school, and those wanting to "stay clean." And of course, many of them were musicians, poets, and artists who made things to sell instead of panhandling and who entertained each other in the evenings. They shared their earnings and combined costs, especially for meal-making that happened over their custom-made Bunsen burners. They met weekly to make decisions and talk through problems. Crys was pretty proud of that place and it evoked a kind of envy in me for creative, cooperative, and alternative community.

Months later, the City's Public Health department declared the site a health risk, and determined to close it down. They supported youth, who were ready, to find housing. Some didn't leave, however, and the day came when the remaining residents ran into the SKETCH studios, reporting through tears that bulldozers and cement trucks shovelled through their housing project, piling their possessions and constructions in heaps to act as bonding agents for cement that was quickly poured to create a wall preventing further access. We'd often heard of belongings being lit on fire or picked up by garbage trucks, and I expressed to Crys, reporting this fateful day to me, that I felt terrible that her belongings

[1] I would like to thank Dr. Jeff Karabanow for his support and input in developing this chapter.
[2] Not her real name

were once again taken from her. She looked at me and stated angrily that she didn't care about her stuff. "We made that place. All they could see is how we could get sick. Why couldn't they see what we made and how it was good?" (Novak, in draft).[3]

The arts have many potential benefits, including intrinsic, community, and personal benefits, and ones that relate to entertainment, quality of life, health and well-being, social capital, education, and economy (Hill, 2014). Art as a form of methodology and intervention is now commonplace in different health care and therapeutic settings, particularly mental health services. It is used to promote intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, functional performance, and personal growth (Griffiths & Corr, 2007). In this chapter, art and the arts refer to many artistic forms: music and vocal arts, creative writing, poetry, drama, dance, visual and digital new media arts, video and film, design, sound, recording arts, textiles and fabric arts, ceramic arts, theatre, community-engaged or activist arts, and installation or performance arts.

THE ARTS IN HEALTH & SOCIAL WELL-BEING

A Canadian Institute for Health Information (2009) report identified various factors that promote positive mental health for youth, all of which have the potential to improve through arts engagement. These factors include:

- Ability to enjoy life in the moment and in the long term (happiness, life satisfaction, subjective well-being);
- Ability to deal with life events (coping and management skills to regulate emotions);
- Emotional well-being (understanding, interpreting, expressing emotions);
- Spiritual well-being (sense of purpose and meaning in life); and
- Social connections and respect for culture, equity, social justice, and personal dignity.

[3] SKETCH (www.sketch.ca) is a community arts enterprise in Toronto that engages young people, aged 16 to 29 years from across Canada, who are navigating poverty, homelessness, or the margins to experience the transformative power of the arts, build leadership and self-sufficiency in the arts, and cultivate environmental and social change through the arts. Since 1996, SKETCH has engaged over 10,000 young people to inform the creation of a placed-based and relational practice rooted in anti-oppression and transformative justice, and a youth co-designed framework of engagement, that sees young people moving from places of creative discovery through focused skills development and finally, to leadership, either in their own lives or to build capacity as innovators in community development, using the arts to address social change.

These factors are particularly relevant for young people who are homeless or who live on the margins, and whose many challenges include mental health issues, past or current trauma, and the significant daily stress that accompanies trying to meet basic needs. These young people often feel a general sense of hopelessness, despair, and isolation, and struggle with perpetual poverty. "Youth homelessness" is a political and economic issue, but it has become a generalized label that obscures the complexity of the experiences of thousands of diverse individuals (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016). Youth experiencing homelessness are forced to grow up fast, managing the demands of survival in the present, which requires clarity of thought and strategic action while navigating the natural developmental chaos of transitioning to adulthood. This process becomes more complex when the challenges of dealing with past trauma, multiple diagnoses, displacement (newcomer youth), or dispossession (Indigenous youth) are added (Karabanow, Kidd, Fredericks, & Hughes, 2016).

Reversing the effects of stressful early life experiences requires repeated activities over a long period of time in order to form new connections in the brain. Many activities can promote this change; music, for example, is particularly powerful because it is an enjoyable way of learning new skills and behaviours that can engage all youth (Scott, 2011). Spiritual well-bring and social connections, two other factors that promote positive mental health, are critical in helping youth move beyond the constraints of homelessness. They are essential components of youth engagement, treatment, and service delivery. Connecting to others and developing a sense of social purpose in community help youth overcome social isolation, complex trauma symptoms, poor physical health, and other challenges (Kidd & Davidson, 2007).

A large body of literature demonstrates the value of art in achieving both individual and social ends; it provides a sense of achievement, promotes health recovery, and contributes to a sense of social belonging through group participation (Star & Cox, 2008; Tesch & Hansen, 2012; Walsh, 2008; White, 2006; Windsor, 2005). Oesi-Kofi (2013) noted that while arts-based research and interventions are not new, they are increasingly being taken up by researchers and health practitioners because of art's potential to "honor multiple ways of knowing, including sensory knowing" (p. 137). The appeal, methodologically, is the possibility of co-creating knowledge with participants, emphasizing reflexivity in the process, and "embodying great potential for consciousness raising and critical dialogue" (p. 137).

The resilience of youth and their ability to survive receive nods of admiration when we see the fullness of their challenges (Kidd & Davidson, 2007). What we applaud less often is youths' unique creativity and entrepreneurship, and we may fail to understand that their distinct agency, skills, and sometimes seemingly other-worldly knowledge are actually vital to the shaping of livable, sustainable, and inclusive communities and economies. Using the arts for youth engagement, particularly for those living on the margins, can provide a way for young people to not only heal, but also to build skills and capacities to determine and gain control of their own life trajectories and to realize a contributing role in shaping society. The arts can become levers with which young people, who are most often cut off from participating in the broader cultural narrative, can speak out, critique, challenge, and indeed shift institutional and cultural paradigms (Karabanow, Gurman, & Naylor, 2012). Youth experiencing homelessness can use the arts as a tool to amplify their voices in order to help decision makers understand their experiences and invest in youth-centred solutions: "Shifting public discourse and understandings about youth homelessness is crucial in order to promote public and governmental investments in solutions" (Schwan, 2017, para. 4). Hearing this voice from the margins, as bell hooks (1989) states, enables us to see the "profound edge" of marginality as a "site of radical possibility, a space of resistance," and of "creativity and power" (pp. 149, 152).

While the possibilities of arts-based interventions for youth experiencing homelessness are many, it is important to recognize the broad range and severity of mental health issues these youth experience and to understand that the role of the arts in formal treatment must adapt to meet different needs. Arts engagement should not replace formal treatment, especially when severe psychosis is involved, but nor should it be dismissed. The arts can be used in direct therapy and treatment, or they can be used in therapeutic ways to support the bigger strategy of engaging with the person's overall sense of isolation and hopelessness. Ideally, formal treatment would include the arts both as a direct intervention and as a way to support change.

THE ARTS AS METHOD

Research shows the significance during youth development of connecting with peers, discovering what youth are good at, and being engaged in things that matter to them (Government of Ontario, 2012). Services for youth sometimes are too generalized and do not consider significant issues young people face around race, gender, and identity. These

are areas in which the arts as method allow for individuation and for young people to "re-author" or reintroduce themselves into situations or circumstances in their own ways and on their own terms (Karabanow et al., 2012). The arts welcome diverse culture, identities, and expressions; they are not only celebrated, but necessary. Diverse perspectives promote accessibility, enrich experiences for everyone, and fuel the kind of inclusive innovation society needs to make change. This openness makes a difference in acknowledging and affirming multiple, layered, and complex (as well as changing) youth identities. This is perhaps the most crucial benefit of integrating the arts into mental health treatment, services, and engagement strategies for youth who are homeless or marginalized—igniting individual creativity to explore or "rewrite" one's own story and find one's voice and skills, and developing capacity to assert one's self into society through creative acts.

THE ARTS FOR LEARNING

Skills learned in arts engagement can be transferred to other life domains and offer new directions that traditional treatment or service modalities may not reveal. Reframing arts engagement to develop leadership in youth hones various skills (Goodman, 2015), including:

- Creative problem solving, inventing and experimenting with new ideas;
- Risk-taking and building confidence;
- Ability to go against the mainstream and develop alternative solutions: this is part of the appeal of the arts for youth on the margins, particularly those who are racialized and suffer stigma attached to discrimination, because they have already experienced the challenge of being rejected or shunned;
- Learning to be yourself: discovering unique potential and opportunities;
- Understanding the power of myth, metaphor, and symbol to shape understanding of complexities and connecting cognitive, emotional, physical, and spiritual capacities;
- Observational skills to be aware of others and the situation in which one finds oneself;
- Project planning using design, goal setting, production, finishing and presentation, and constructive critique; and
- Collaboration and appropriation: building empathy, cooperation, and accountability for actions in response to the impacts actions have on others.

Phillips (2012) has identified additional skills that are developed through engagement in the arts:

- Focus and concentration;
- Non-verbal and verbal communication;
- Perseverance, motivation, commitment, and sense of accomplishment;
- Time management;
- Personal discipline and initiative;
- Adaptability and reflexivity;
- Ability to work under pressure; and
- Ability to integrate values, beliefs, and cultural expression into the production of original artwork.

Training youth who are homeless in artistic skills can prepare them for careers in the arts and other creative industries—one of the fastest growing contributors to the economy (City of Toronto, n.d). There are some great programs across Canada—for example, SKETCH, the Remix Project, and VIBE Arts—that integrate arts and community development with career training and paid work experiences to marginalized youth and that prepare them to enter industry or further their education (Schwan, 2017).

THE ARTS FOR DEVELOPING AGENCY

Agency is an essential ingredient in the human experience. The arts stimulate the imagination so we see ourselves bigger than we are. Imagination is necessary to enable youth to try on identities and experiment with new realities beyond confined circumstances and imposed stigmas. The whole trajectory offered to youth through engagement in the arts—discovering, experimenting, and developing capacity to reintroduce themselves as "makers" and "co-creators," rather than as youth with complex challenges—is critical to realizing themselves beyond living as "service users." The process moves youth into civic engagement and active pursuit of new futures beyond the limitations of poverty or homelessness, integrating their experiences and multiple challenges. Karabanow and Naylor (2015) highlight similar findings in their analysis of an art camp for young people experiencing housing instability. The camp gave youth space to provide feedback and build leadership skills with which to confront dominant narratives and create new ways of being. Such a space is critical for young people who feel the restrictions, real or imposed, of mental health challenges. It enables them to transform from stigmatized and powerless individuals into hopeful, resilient, powerful, and active agents in their own personal wellness and in the wellness of broader society.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF ART IN HEALTH CARE

Youth can become co-builders of new service, treatment, and engagement paradigms. What would happen if mental health services for young people who navigate complexities of poverty, homelessness, and marginalization could include medical prescriptions to engage in arts-based activities—not art therapy per se, but simply arts activities in multiple forms? What if court orders mandated participation in arts-based projects to address community issues? What if youth in long-term care facilities or in detention were invited to co-design their treatment and were given tools to make films, songs, or art pieces about their experiences? What if centres for youth engagement in the arts worked alongside hospitals, schools, detention, health, social services, and employment centres to coordinate youth services? What if we viewed an invigorated imagination in youth development as a critical resource in mental health treatment or in wrap-around support to navigate the challenges of homelessness or poverty? And what if the arts could be used as a training method and mental health support for front-line workers and case managers to prevent burnout and connect them as partners with youth in creative activity?

INTERVENTION COMPONENTS

AESTHETIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR ARTS-BASED INTERVENTIONS

This section discusses changing the look and feel of youth engagement and service delivery to embrace the arts. It also highlights past projects to illustrate the possibilities of arts-based interventions for mental health.

Maximizing youth engagement

Engagement that centres on young people's creative capacity and focuses on drawing out their creative contributions means interactions, activities, and supports that immediately activate their imagination. Viewing and engaging youth as community developers, rather than clients or patients, and seeking their creative input in solving individual, community, and global challenges, is empowering and strategic, and can even be fun. Further, if the engagement itself is less about addressing individual experiences and invites youth to consider broader issues, youth can experience a self-constructed, or in the case of groups a co-constructed, context within which to address their own issues, in their own time, and in their own way.

Six young women explored gender identity and the impacts of drug overuse through making life-size sculptures out of recycled materials. They shared ideas and exchanged found objects, told stories inspired by the rusted metals and discards, and contributed to each other's sculptures over eight weeks of engagement. Together they confronted issues of gender-based violence and addiction, and collaborated on messaging through a public exhibition of their six sculptures that were set up along an open area by the railroad tracks in Toronto. Thousands of GO train commuters were powerfully affected by this group of incredible art pieces that, standing alone, would have been invisible. The process and the product were possible because youth were engaged not as "victims" or "addicts," but as sculptors engaging in critical topics that deeply affected them and because they made public statements in solidarity with their distinct art pieces. The experience catapulted these formerly isolated young people into a new sense of identity as individuals and as a group involved in civic engagement. Through the process, each participant made advances in personal care and coping with addiction and violence.

Creating engaging spaces

The spaces in which services engage young people need physical makeovers to represent the look and feel of health, of aliveness, of invitation to create and collaborate, where youth themselves are primary designers in how the space works. Increasingly more health and youth centres are being designed that consider the effects of colour, shape, structure, and relationship to space. When youth walk into an arts studio rather than into a waiting room, they see raw art materials and equipment, and pieces in various unfinished and finished states. These are powerful metaphors that have a visceral effect and can set the tone for how youth will participate in processes that will benefit them. The energy of "making" is all around them, and their sense of possibility is stimulated because they have access to all kinds of tools with which to "re-create" themselves.

Youth engagement and service delivery spaces (temporary or permanent) could be set up as art studios or "maker labs" in various disciplines. Entering a ceramic arts studio, youth see clay in rough form, carving tools, and pottery wheels. In a music studio they find various instruments and hear original sounds that were recorded with software on laptops. The messages communicated are, first, that they are creators; second, that they

are humans with experiences, ideas, and skills that can help solve problems; and third, that they can make choices about working in a domain of learning they choose. This goes beyond whether a young person has artistic skill or interest. It is about setting up a space that catalyzes a different kind of engagement and honours creative capacity.

Artistic tools themselves (with applied safety-first considerations) can offer messages to young people about their role in treatment. For example, a young person receives a sketchbook or journal and a black fine-line marker. This sends a message that their ideas matter and that their creative process is honoured. The exposure to tools and potential work spaces creates a less institutional feel and even invites youth to help break rigid systems or forms. This means moving beyond having Plasticine or crayons and paper on tables, although that's a start.

> At a mental health conference, a poet's corner was set up in a quiet part of the conference hall. In this simple, calm space, notebooks and fine-tip markers, self-care books, pieces of creative writing, poetry, nature magazines, and quieting objects sat on a coffee table between comfortable chairs, and paneless window frames hung from the ceiling, carving out a calm space in the midst of a talk-heavy and crowded gathering. The space sent a subtle but powerful message to youth to take time apart and be still, and that their reflections, their meaning-making, were a critical part of the conference.

PEOPLE & PARTNERSHIPS IN ARTS-BASED INTERVENTIONS

This section discusses how health and social services providers can work with professional artists and youth leaders to facilitate arts engagement among youth who are homeless.

Working with community-engaged artists and arts educators

Community-engaged artists and arts educators can be partners in health or social services for youth. These professionals develop their art practices in communities, with community members, where process and product are equally valued. Too often, arts engagement is limited to art therapy in clinical practice or to arts activities led by recreation workers, social workers, or at best, child and youth care workers. These activities offer value, but valuable opportunities are missed if established artists, creative entrepreneurs, or arts

educators are not engaged in leadership roles. These partners to young people (and to health practitioners) offer new perspectives, design exercises, activities, and skills development that create access for diverse young people to move into challenging moments, cope with hard feelings, deal with experiences, solve problems, and make new declarations that maintain the focus on issues rather than treatment. Artists ask questions differently. It's just part of being an art maker. Community-engaged artists are specifically trained to animate and engage with community members around their self-declared issues. Realizing the full potential of this work requires hiring professional community-engaged artists.

> At a Disable the Label youth gathering,[4] we created a huge archway made of ramshackle wood pieces that symbolized the movement beyond stigma and into health. In creating the archway, nothing was measured; all the pieces were different lengths. It was lopsided and hodgepodge, but had a strong wooden base so it could stand on its own and people could pass through it. Designing together with youth and service providers, we first listed on paper the names, labels, and diagnoses youth wanted to leave behind (e.g., fag, stupid, over-emotional, fat, psychotic, suicidal, bipolar, burden). We later burned the lists in a campfire. Etched into the wood and attached to it for the duration of the gathering were messages and names youth preferred (e.g., fun, inspirational, alternative thinker, adventurer, musician, poet, good friend). All week, youth talked about the power of leaving stereotypical labels behind, burning them in a fire, and entering the gathering space where they referred to each other using chosen, new, hopeful, and artistic terms. It was empowering and beautiful. Artists worked with the organizers to design the concept, and youth were engaged in giving life and meaning to it with their contributions of text. This is an example of the kind of partnership that is possible.
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> Similar examples resulted from the Ontario Arts Council Arts and Health Residency pilot program in 2010. Artists were placed in long-term health settings in Toronto and North Bay, where they explored the connections between wellness and creativity. The pilot led to numerous partnerships between artists and health centres that focused on health promotion and alternative treatments (Health Nexus, 2010).

[4] Disable the Label is a summer training retreat for young community leaders and their adult allies in the mental health system. For more about the program, visit www.thenewmentality.ca/disablethelabel/.

Engaging youth peer leaders

The mere presence of peers to move alongside youth participating in processes that are challenging or to model those processes is essential to making things more accessible and effective for young people. Arts approaches work best if peer leaders are part of arts engagement from beginning to end: from needs assessment, to project design, implementation, and evaluation. Sharing the experience with someone who understands offers youth participants a reflection of what could be if they followed a similar path. It is critical to budget for the engagement of young people as leaders to advise project development, co-facilitate, and participate in evaluation. Too often, budgeting for this important role means minimum wage short-term positions, where young people can be exploited for the investment of their time and unique contributions, which can often lead to commitment well beyond paid hours. Preparing youth for peer leadership involves training, supervision, and clarifying roles, as well as developing strategies to deal with triggers. Peers, no matter how far along they may be in their journeys, can be challenged by instability when they work on a project with other youth whose experience resembles their own. Budget considerations for livable wages, training, and ongoing support need to be integrated for successful engagement.

Partnering with front-line workers

The arts can be used to build capacity of those involved in front-line service coordination and delivery. It can also offer skills and renewal to prevent burnout and ensure relevant youth engagement. Commitment to annual training or professional development in the arts can offer new perspectives, and can re-position the caseworker as co-creator with youth, which enables young people to take ownership in their journeys and see the worker as a partner in that journey.

> SKETCH hosts a partners art playground four times a year, where service providers and youth come together for a collaborative art-making experience. In our impact evaluations, service providers report feeling refreshed. They also describe their interactions with youth as feeling different and having a deeper quality that did not tax their energy. SKETCH also conducts a three-day training program three times a year to help service providers and artist facilitators prepare for seasonal projects and activities. The program has become very popular; it now requires registration and has a waiting list of practitioners interested in learning how to use the arts to engage youth.

DYNAMICS & MECHANICS OF ARTS-BASED INTERVENTIONS

This section describes foundational elements in designing arts-engaged programs for youth who are homeless.

Shifting the practice from therapy to creativity

It is important that arts-engaged programs keep things in the realm of creative discovery, skill building, and community engagement, and that they recognize therapeutic impacts as secondary. Art therapy is a distinct clinical practice requiring specific conditions. Creative discovery is different. It focuses on creating ideas, experimenting, making mistakes, and learning skills. The artwork created doesn't need interpretation. Instead, it can be "critiqued" around the use of lines, shapes, colours, composition, and so on as ways for youth to reflect on the choices they make and what they want to articulate, rather than as a way for the viewer to "get inside of the young person's head." Sometimes it may mean supporting youth to shift the direction of their work or asking them questions about composition if they appear lost in a deep, expressive process that may need support. This encourages youth to become more objective viewers of their own production and puts them at less risk of needing more protective conditions. It takes nimbleness and courage on the part of the facilitator to interrupt in these sensitive moments. The engagement is around generating creative ideas, analyzing, and interacting. It is important to support the development of private spaces for those who want to create independently, where possible, but the practice is engagement for their benefit and their safety.

Designing an arts learning framework

Developing an arts learning framework or a working theory of change can guide activities and desired outcome in arts engagement. It takes youth through a process of discovery and development into leadership capacity. This is best done with youth to recognize the learning arc they experience as their engagement deepens over time. Designing programs that allow for incremental and progressive accomplishments for youth that build on one another reinforces immediate positive benefits and points youth toward potential benefits if they invest more time and energy in learning through the arts. Engaging youth to track and recognize their own milestones and learning can offer them increased ownership of their developmental process. This can be as simple as engaging them to photograph the work they create and compile it into a digital portfolio, or it can involve creating a longer-term skills inventory that gives them a sense of accomplishment as they see their skills improve over time.

Anti-oppression and transformative/restorative justice

Critical to working in creative engagement with young people is anti-oppressive practice. This involves a willingness to address the impacts of power and a commitment to equity and restorative justice. The role of art is to make meaning, question assumptions, provoke emotion, and stimulate divergent thinking. This is part of the appeal for youth on the margins to engage in arts processes. For them to invest in the process, they need to know they can question systems and structures, and address barriers or canonized ideas they perceive or have experienced, to limit their freedoms. Setting a context that explicitly declares intentions to break down and reduce barriers to youth caused by systemic oppressions such as racism, gender-based violence, colonialism, ableism, and homophobia or transphobia is necessary for diverse youth to be affirmed in their multiple identities and to freely engage in the process. Encouraging youth to question power dynamics and systems is essential to the realization of agency. Working together in arts processes neutralizes power dynamics that set one person apart from the other as "expert." The "adults" or "service providers" should engage together with young people in art making, rather than sit apart watching the action so youth feel like they are in a fishbowl. Co-creation sends the message that all contributions are equal in value and recognizes the vulnerability of being in a creative process (Neighbourhood Arts Network, 2014).

Investing in an infrastructure for arts engagement

Investing in infrastructure is important. Spaces and tools for arts engagement must be available. Art making (in its various forms) requires more than point-in-time multi-use spaces if we are to realize the full potential of the arts with young people. Just as gymnasiums and outdoor basketball courts are critical to neighbourhoods, arts engagement spaces need to become central in urban planning. If arts engagement is recognized as critical to health promotion and health services, then having accessible youth arts centres near or within health service facilities themselves can offer greater connection to achieving mutual outcomes. Financial investment in hiring and training facilitators, artists, and front-line workers, and in contracting youth themselves to lead, is part of the infrastructure needed for successful arts programming and projects. Art materials and equipment can be expensive, much like sports training equipment for gyms or computers for libraries. But youth living on the margins deserve high-quality tools that demonstrate investment in their creative development, rather than the usual second-hand items that may come with huge service costs.

Long-term financial investment in infrastructures for arts and creativity by governments is critical to develop engagement strategies with youth that support their mental health and leadership development. This includes assistance with training and ongoing support and professional development in the field; resources to hire arts workers and youth peer leaders to work with primary care services; and funds for research around alignment of the arts with learning, technology, and sciences. Post-secondary institutions have developed formal curricula around arts engagement to begin to train practitioners to lead the integration of arts into various sectors and communities. Examples include the Community Engaged Arts Certificate program at York University in Toronto and the Art and Social Change minor degree program at OCAD University in Toronto. Investment and infrastructure to support these efforts and make them accessible represent numerous possibilities in innovations in youth services, treatment, and engagement.

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